ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIVING
OUR RESEARCH ON LOCAL ROTTERDAM INITIATIVES
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Poortgebouw
SCRAP XL
KIOSK

Alternative Ways of Living

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Sol and Anne-Christy photographed by Pavlos

Foreword

The first draft of this publication was presented in March 2024 at the Willem de Kooning Academy, where all of us were studying at the time. We had the opportunity to work together within the school's "Practices" programme, where students from different departments within the academy are given the chance to collaborate in a course of their choice. The goal of the course "Local Initiatives and Shared Values", designed by the WdKA's "Business Station", was for students to explore local artist-run initiatives in Rotterdam, and to find a way to share our findings and experiences with our fellow students. When the class was divided into different groups, the five of us decided to work together, as we shared common values, interests and questions. The process of finding a subject of study was shaped by an urgent longing for change, which was something all of us felt. Although we were supposed to focus on a single initiative, we decided to deviate from that and instead reached out to several initiatives that resonated with us. During this time, we created our own network of initiatives. Initially inspired by documentation projects such as the interactive online map "The Autonomous Fabric of Rotterdam" created by the WdKA's research unit in collaboration with Autonomous Practices teachers and students, as well as the Business Station's "Initiatives" list, we aimed to build upon these efforts by focusing on a more personal perspective. We decided to include the voices of the people involved in such initiatives through interviews, as well as our own reflections. Nearly a year later, and following a recommendation from the WdKA's research professor Florian Cramer, we decided to make our research accessible to a wider audience. We hope that the knowledge shared here can be useful, and will inspire others in pursuing alternatives to what they perceive as the norm.

Anne-Christy, Sol, Pavlos

June 2025

Introduction

What does "alternative" mean?

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the definition of "alternative" is: (of one or more things) available as another possibility or choice. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "alternative" as: different from the usual or conventional, such as: existing or functioning outside the established cultural, social, or economic system. What, then, is the established system? How does it affect us? How can we fight it? Capitalism is the norm, not only in the organisation of the economy, but also in our social interactions and ways of living. By researching what are considered alternative ways of living and organising, we seek to show that change is possible, and to destroy the myth that capitalism is the only way forward.

Illustration by Sol Muñoz-Baroja Acaso

SCRAP
sinds
1984

SCRAP XL

Material repurposing project

SCRAP gives waste materials a second chance. SCRAP sells industrial residual material, or the belongings of people who have died, while also organising workshops and creating set designs on commission. SCRAP's vision of seeing waste as an opportunity to transform it into something else made us want to delve into their perspective and learn more about them. The first time we visited SCRAP, we met Monique Eilertsen, the owner, who kindly provided us the time and space to interview her.

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Interview with Monique Eilertsen

Interviewers: Catarina Van Krieken, Anne-Christy Maljaars, Sol Muñoz-Baroja Acaso, Jennifer Slobodzjan/ Editor: Anne-Christy Maljaars

Can you tell us how this initiative came to be?

SCRAP was started by two other people in 1984, as a project for unemployed people. They got the original idea from an initiative in Boston, in the USA. I've been working here since 1999. I used to come in as a customer. I was always looking for stuff that wasn't available in the usual stores.

Can you tell us something about how you get the resources? How do you get the stuff you sell here?

We used to search a lot ourselves. We were always interested in what's out on the street. But in the last five or ten years, people have started coming to us. So we don't need to do so much research anymore. Back in the 1990s, we used to be seen as a bunch of stupid artistic people that were just doing nonsense. We weren't appreciated that much. But more and more, we started being seen by people from, for example, the Willem de Kooning Academy, and people doing creative things. Times have changed. We just kept on going, even in troubled times when we didn't have any money. We've been bankrupt once. We started with nothing, but we kept going.

What is the goal of SCRAP? What are you fighting for?

Well, the goal is to show people that all of this is waste, but that in fact, 90% of these materials are still new, and you can reuse them and do other things with them. We used to do that a lot more when I was younger, in the 1980s. Picking up stuff from the street, because we didn't have much money. But now we're living in times where everything is much easier to buy – I'm not saying necessarily cheaper, but some things are – and people are consuming too much and throwing away too fast. They're not fixing things. In my time, when things were broken, you could get them fixed, we had repair shops. We also work with young kids, to give them an awareness of the amount of crap that we're producing, and

that not all of it is actually crap. So that's kind of the goal of SCRAP, to show that, even though all of this is waste, it doesn't need to be wasted.

What problems do you encounter running this business?

Problems? Hhmmm… Sometimes, I don't get enough time to pick up stuff. When people throw things away, and especially when people die, the waste, their materials, get thrown away so fast. Not always, but sometimes. There isn't enough time to pick it up.

And do you also hold workshops here?

Yes, we do. We had children come in this afternoon. We give them workshops for four days. Also, different groups come by to see what kind of jobs you can get in a place like this. So they can see the possibilities and opportunities that different jobs can provide, and we can educate them on that.

Do you also restore things here?

Yes. I restore little things, like chairs sometimes. If I can fix something, I will. I like restoring things, but I don't have much time for it. Sometimes I take things apart, either to understand what they are, or to just to sell the parts separately.

And why is the neighbourhood so important?

The schools play a big part. We have lots of people from local schools. Also, most people come here by public transport or by bike. So, it's important to have an accessible space where everyone can come.

13.03.2024

Can we reduce our waste?

Can we change our perspective on the ways in which we consume?

We can. SCRAP proves that consuming in an alternative way is possible, by running a business that's not solely focused on profit. SCRAP's stance towards consumerism challenges the capitalistic buy-and-throwaway economy, which is still the norm nowadays. We need to think in a more sustainable and circular way: repairing what's broken, and questioning the usage and reuse of materials. We can and should imagine ways to give new meaning to the things we already have!

€17.50
winst uit

Poortgebouw

Living group / former squat / community association

We came across the Poortgebouw and it's community and vision while looking for initiatives that would qualify as “alternative”. Thanks to Chiara Tonndorf, a fellow student, we were able to understand the basis on which the Poortgebouw operates, as well as getting to know the personal story and insights of someone currently living there.

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Interview with Chiara Tonndorf

Interviewers: Catarina Van Krieken, Anne-Christy Maljaars, Sol Muñoz-Baroja Acaso, Jennifer Slobodzjan/ Editor: Sol Muñoz-Baroja Acaso

Can you tell us something about where you live? The community you're a part of?

I live in the Poortgebouw, a community in the South of Rotterdam, next to the Maas River. The building looks a little bit like a castle, and it stretches above the road. It was squatted in the 1980s during the squatting season because the city was planning on establishing a brothel ("eros centre") there, which the neighbourhood didn't really like. So, the squatters of the time came in with the support of the neighbourhood, squatted the building and then the municipality gave the squatters a legal rental contract, as sort of an experiment. To this day, we have the same contract and we never changed it. So we still have the rights of a 1980s contract, which are a lot better than the rights nowadays, and we pay a comparable amount of rent as back in the day. The house was originally designed as an office space. For 100 years it was the headquarters of the harbour authorities, because there's a harbour running close by, like an exit. The building wasn't meant to be lived in. The only way to repurpose this house and to live there was to have communal living. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to have so many separate units with their own kitchen and bathroom. The only way to do this is by sharing. You can see now how there's a room which for whatever reason has 32 electrical outlets, while there are other rooms that have no sockets at all. This history is visible in the building. The squatters in the 1980s changed a lot in the layout of the house. They built kitchens, a platform in each room, toilets. A lot of the layout changed. The basic walls are still there, but then the only legal way to make any changes was to have the municipality accept them. The rules are that we aren't allowed to change anything that has to do with the outer walls. So we cannot build onto these, even from the inside. The agreement is: the outside falls under the authority of the municipality, while the interior is managed by the association of residents, that's us. The building is a historical monument, so we can't change it.

You told us about the space. You have certain groups of people you live with. How many people do you share a kitchen or bathroom with? How does this work?

So the house is divided into 4 floors, and we're organised according to a sociocratic model. This basically means that there are independent groups that are responsible for certain topics. In our case, for example, we have one group responsible for maintenance, another group responsible for activities. These groups can make independent decisions within their own domain. They don't need to ask the whole association for every single decision. And if there are decisions that affect everybody, these are brought to the general meeting. We meet once a month and we decide all together. This also means that we make decisions based on consensus, rather than majority vote. We have many rounds of discussion until we reach a common ground, and we can all agree on solutions as to how we should go forward on certain topics. So power is divided rather than centralised. Also, for legal matters we need to have one shared person who is registered at the KVK (Chamber of Commerce), and this rotates depending on who wants to do it. We also have a treasurer that takes care of the money, but this doesn't rotate because no one wants to do it.

How does the rent then work? Do you all pay the same?

Yes. Each resident pays for their room, and the amount is always the same, no matter how big or small your room is. The bare rent is, if I'm not mistaken, 190 euros. So, it's super low for Rotterdam. The rent does increase each year with a certain percentage, like it does in the rest of the city, but during the years I've lived here, it's only increased by 50 euros. Besides that, we pay another 200 euros which takes care of utilities such as gas, electricity, water. Also, we pay for toilet paper because we buy toilet paper together. We buy it in pallets! (laughs.) We also share Wi-Fi and some communal food. I don't buy cleaning supplies. I don't have to set aside a part of my own budget for all these things every month. There are also some people who share a room. You can live with as many people as you want in a room. It can become quite crowded, but you can. The extra person then just pays 200 euros extra for utilities. And children don't pay anything.

With how many people do you live here?

We just had some changes, so I think we are 33 at the moment, of which 4 are children.

How many rooms?

27 private rooms, if I'm not mistaken. We divide spaces into private, communal and public. Private rooms are private rooms, you can do whatever you want in there, it's your haven. You can build whatever you want, as long as you don't change the outer wall. You can really make it your space. People make beautiful things, or people trash them. Whatever suits you. The communal spaces are the living rooms. They're super big, as big as the street. And the kitchen and toilets are also communal, and then we have a workshop space, which is also a communal area. You can paint there, use it as a sewing station, or change the room into what you need. I once hosted people there, I had 50 people sleeping there. So yeah, it's kind of a multipurpose space. And downstairs we have the public area which consists of a swap shop, which is a shop that works without money. You can bring things, you can take things. We're open once a week. We also have a little cafe-bar thing, a venue space for concerts, and the queer feminist library. This is an initiative that originated outside the house. It wasn't born here, it already existed and they needed space, so we facilitated it for them. They came to the Poortgebouw and are now based here, but they also do events outside of the Poortgebouw. We do these collaborations quite regularly. We also have a drumming group that practices in our space.

What are your values as a house?

Usually, a community has a vision, and usually this means that the people that come together within this community are quite homogenous. But here, it's not that narrow. The vision that unites the Poortgebouw is that it can be an experimental ground for cultural activities. That's why we have a lot of concerts, including a lot of experimental music. I've seen some pretty weird things. Some great stuff, but frankly also a lot of questionable stuff. We're all kind of artsy, and we're all leftists. But there's a whole spectrum of what that means, so we're not very homogenous in that sense. We try to keep a balance between Dutch and international, a balance of gender and age. Our youngest member is a few months old and our oldest is 57. A few years ago, before I moved in, we decided on the sociocratic model, because before that it was all very punk. A lot of these punk values still apply: anarchy instead of hierarchy, experimentation as an attitude. But it also means that we're quite dirty, and also quite messy (laughs).

Can you tell us a bit more about the sociocratic model?

Yes, it means that each group is open for everyone to join; there is transparency in what these groups decide, but the core thing is that the group has the authority to decide within a certain domain. Before forming a group, you decide what the group's domain is. In our house, there is of course a lot of overlap between the different groups. So I can be in 3 groups, as well as the general meeting. Usually, in a corporate model, you would only be in one group.

Can you give us an example of how decisions are made?

For example, the activity group decides about the events that happen in the public spaces, and also how late these events can go on. Some people live right above the event space, so it might happen that you have really loud music on a Wednesday night at 3:00 AM, but you need to get up early the next morning. So, you would address the activity group and say, hey, this is really annoying, can we find a solution? Maybe let's not have late events during the week. If the activity group doesn't follow up on this, then it would be a problem that comes back to the general meeting, and together we try to find a solution. Right now, the solution is that during the week we don't play past 12:00. We have one event a month that can be all night, I think. But we're also punk, so our rules are all very flexible.

This whole process of decision making: does it work? Everyone has different ways of seeing decision making. How do you find common ground?

Finding common ground is a lot easier than you think. We start by agreeing on a basic starting point. Then, sometimes it's important to come back and revise what we agreed upon. If we can't find common ground, then let's take it back a step: why are we here? We're here to live together, to have a good time together, and to experiment and support each other. So that usually helps. The challenge is that I come from a background of sociocratic facilitation – but not within a house. Otherwise, you can put aside your emotions, because that's not what you're there for. But being in a house always comes with emotions, and we have to make space for that. If there's any conflict, we have conflict mediation, and it kind of works.

How did you come to live here?

Luck! Pure luck, I would say. I'd lived in two different communities before. Coming to Rotterdam, I was faced with the housing crisis, and so I thought I could give it a shot. So I texted all the communities I could find here, including the Poortgebouw. They said they didn't currently have any space, but that they would put me on the waiting list. And then I completely forgot about it. I moved 5 times in the meantime, until I finally got an email: hey, there will be a free room, do you want to come to our new people meeting? I thought: actually, I'm quite happy where I'm living at the moment. I'm not really interested in moving now. But I also thought: I really want to see the space from the inside, because you don't usually get the opportunity otherwise. So I went. During the first half of the meeting, I had quite a horrible time. I wasn't managing very nicely in the conversation. I was surrounded by people who are quite special – our house is full of special people. They said they made something called noise. I had no idea what that meant. I was like, cool? Nice... And then ten more minutes of awkwardness. But during the second half I had a really lovely time, with people more similar to me, where we had stuff to talk about. And after that meeting they chose two people. I wasn't their first choice. I was the second choice, for the second room. Luckily, I think it was also a time when there weren't too many people on the waiting list.

A few weeks ago, we chose a new person and there were 30 people on the list. We keep trying to find a better system of how to select new people, because we only see these people for ten minutes and we can't really make an informed decision based on that. It's already improved a lot compared to how it was before I arrived. When I came here for the first time, they did it differently: first, everyone was all together, all the people they invited, and then – good luck! But now we divide the potential new people into groups. You go from room to room and you talk with three or four people each time, so you have a clearer picture. And then we discuss based on consensus decision-making. This works by first having a round where you say who you would like to vote for, with positive arguments. Next, you have another round where someone else proposes an argument that might make you change your mind, and a third round where you say your final vote. Then we try to see if there is a clear favourite, and the facilitator proposes this person. After that, we do another round where you can say whether you have concerns or anything that bugs you, and finally another round where everyone says "I consent". For big decisions, we wrap up with a round where everyone says "I consent". For small decisions, it's enough to raise your hand.

How has your experience been of living in the Poortgebouw?

It can be quite challenging in the beginning, to find your way, to understand what's happening, what needs to happen, how to go about things you would like to see happen... In the beginning I was like: can I do this, or not? The answer is usually: just go for it.

How long have you been living in the Poortgebouw?

For more than two years. By now it's my family, in so many ways. They're there when I come home. I have breakfast with them. I also moved to another room within the house. First, I was living on the ground floor, then I moved to the second floor where the living room is. I wanted to be where all the action is, but not everyone wants that. The ground floor is very quiet.

Would you say you're living in an alternative way?

From my own perspective, for myself, I don't think so, no. This is my life: this is the only way I can imagine it. But from an outside perspective, I would say – hell yeah! People love to ask questions about the house, they're super intrigued. It seems very strange to them that I share my toilet with ten people. How could that work? It seems unimaginable to them. So, from an outside perspective, definitely yes.

When you hear the words "alternative ways of living", what comes to mind?

For anything to be "alternative," you first have to decide what is the norm, and I guess the norm would be to live with your nuclear family in a separate unit, and also in a city. So I guess living outside of a city, being more in touch with nature, could already be classified as alternative. And also, of course, not being hooked to the grid for water and electricity. I think if any of these conditions apply, then it's already quite alternative. After that, you can have different levels of being alternative.

19.03.2024

Is it possible to think and live in a way that transcends the individualistic society?

Is it possible to imagine new forms of organising that promote collaboration, while at the same time encouraging autonomy?

Yes, to both questions. We need to start questioning and reimagining the structures in which we have been taught to think, and to start creating, living and practicing new forms and perspectives. The Poortgebouw is a clear example that shows this is possible.

Binnenhavenbrug
4.0m
automatisch

PIONIERSMEENT DE
STOKERIJ
STAD
IN DE
MAAK
RAW
35

KIOSK

Bookstore / print workshop / leaky press

We first discovered KIOSK during the opening event of its new space in the North of Rotterdam in December of 2023. Since then, we've been going there regularly to find new books and to have a talk with Philippa Driest, the artist who runs it. Philippa was kind enough to give us the time to discuss with her how KIOSK came to be and how it operates, but also to talk about activism, squatting, books, collectives, art and politics.

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Interview with Philippa Driest

Interviewers: Anne-Christy Maljaars, Sol Muñoz-Baroja Acaso, Pavlos Theodorou/ Editor: Pavlos Theodorou

Can you tell us some things about yourself, and about how this initiative came to be?

Yes! My name is Philippa, but people also know me as Flip. I'm 31 and my pronouns are she/her. I was educated as an artist. I studied at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, where I graduated in 2015. Then I moved to Rotterdam. I'm originally from The Hague. In 2018, I was asked to do a temporary project in a little house that was connected to a bridge close to the Euromast. And that space used to be KIOSK. So I made three or four newspapers there, all of which were about public space and how it's used. One was about squatting. In another one, I talked with an architectural historian about how buildings are built for a certain function, but then are turned into housing. I hosted a lot of self-publishing practices from artists, a lot of zines, things I found on online anarchist libraries, or things I had from my archive. I would put them there and people would visit. But it was a temporary project, and eventually that was over. A year later I had to find a job, so I became a janitor in a street that has since been demolished (Almondestraat), actually, but for two or three years it was used as a test case in how collective ownership works (initiated by the collective Stad in de Maak). How can you own property through non-profit systems? How does it work? How do you manage that? Can you make it rent-free so that neighbourhood initiatives can really do their thing? I became a janitor there, and somewhere in that street I had a really small space. It had a big window. I was there every day doing rent payments, laundry, handling keys, all that kind of stuff. Everybody passed through that reception to take care of shit. And there were a lot of different people living there. At one point I started to put some books on a shelf. At the time I was reading a lot of radical theory, mostly from Verso Books and Pluto Books, which publish a lot of radical theory, and it's hard to get them. So I put that on the shelf and that grew out into the bookshop. After two years I had to leave because it was being demolished, so I moved to a really little space in

a print shop close by for a year. Then a few months ago, in December, I moved here. I'm super happy. I can stay here for three more years. The space is provided by the organisation Stad in de Maak. They have their office upstairs. They're doing this try-out with temporary management to see if they can collectively buy something.

How does that work?

They make this kind of contract with social housing corporations, that for five to ten years they can try this out. They've had this space, the offices on the top floors, and also next door, for 10 years. Officially it's ending next year, but there's a little bit of an extension. In the 10 years that they've been trying this, they didn't really manage. I think at the moment they may be in conversation about something new.

Is this an organisation that buys property collectively? How do they make the money to buy the property?

I don't know specifically, but I think it's certain organisations that fund them through different means. Loans by banks, but also funds from people who have money. And they collect this and put it in a system so that the property can never be sold for profit. They work in the form of an association or a foundation. I think there are different ones like this in the Netherlands, such as Vrijkoop for example. I think in Germany, this system is way more common than in the Netherlands. I mean, here, you see with squats that were legalised, that they have contracts with municipalities or with social housing corporations, so that people can manage their own living situation. When people want to move in, they can decide who comes in or not. They structure themselves. And I think there's a couple of examples. Like in the Poortgebouw, for example, there's a private owner. So, from squatting to legalisation, the group is really protected by rent rights. But there's always this situation that they could be evicted through court cases. So anyway, they did this and I needed a new space so they said, well, why don't you come here? Because they always wanted to have this space for collective use, and they asked me if I'd want to move in here and activate the space. I'm super happy to do so. Because it's big and I can also set up some printing equipment!

Is the space something you get for free?

No, I have to pay the costs for electricity and everything.

But don't they make a profit out of it?

No, it's just the minimum, so that they can pay the bills and all that stuff. But it's non-commercial. I've been looking into how it would be if I had to rent something commercially. But it's just not possible, because you have to make so many compromises in how you run things. If you start working with the idea that you need to make money in order to do things, it affects the content of your work.

How is this working out for you financially? How did you get started with this?

I started with the books that I needed for the Master degree I was doing at the time. I didn't have any money, I didn't have any savings. You know about the student loan, that you don't have to pay interest, right? So, I would borrow 1,000 euros a month. And with that money, I would buy books, sell them, and see how that would go. It's through that loan that I could get started. So there's this continuation: I earn a bit of money, then I buy some books, then I see how it goes. Sometimes I want to order so many books, but I need to wait until I have some money. That's why I'm open only one day a week. Because I don't really get an income out of this. And besides that, I also have an artistic practice, and I work as a freelancer. You have to be very flexible in how you run your weeks and days. And I can't really pay people to work here. So that's why it's open only one day a week.

And what kind of freelance work do you do besides this?

So many different things. I do a lot of workshops or guest lectures, and I print things. Right now I'm also working on a film, and I need to write this application to get some funding, etc. etc. So it's all different types of things.

When you first started, how did you manage to learn about all the practical aspects? How do you start something like this?

I think you have to be very delusional (laughs). You have to be very naive to start something like this. And yeah, you just start! You google how something works, you send an email to a publisher. You say, hey, I run this bookshop. Can I get some books? How does it work? Or like, what are interesting books? And then they tell you, okay, you can get a discount that is around 30% or 40%. And then they say, okay, we can send you 10 copies. And then you pay whatever, 300 euros. That's how it works. And then you have to just figure out what's important

for yourself. A lot of people will recommend titles, but you always need to make sure that there are titles that YOU find important. Or, you know, to just have a passion for books.

Do you have time to read books?

No! I mean, right now I'm reading a lot for this film. I'm reading about the harbour history of Rotterdam. I've got this really amazing book. It's called Red Rotterdam and it was published in the 1980s by this activist collective, that were also operating from a squat here in Rotterdam. They made this book about the antifascist and workers' movement in the 1930s in Rotterdam. So now I'm kind of going through that, which is very specific. Otherwise, I read a lot of the backs of books, because you need to understand a bit what's in there, so that you can recommend books. You have to really become a librarian. You have to know and understand the categories that people read about. Although I'm a bit against making categories, because I think, especially when you're browsing through books, it's interesting to go into a book shop and to be a bit surprised by which titles you find next to each other. Instead of just always going for what you think you want to learn. Because I believe a lot of what we read is just to confirm what we already think, and it's nice actually to go outside of that!

I believe that in the Poortgebouw they have a queer and feminist library? What can you tell us about that?

Yeah, that's a project by Sam and Matti, but now they also have more people running it. They just started it, out of the need to have more libraries. Thinking about this with regard to KIOSK, for example: sometimes I have a lot of titles that are from academic publishers, and they're like 30 euros. Super expensive. So, I wish I could turn it into a library, because it's not about the shop part of it. I don't want to bring people together only by ways of transaction.

What about the local impact of KIOSK? Do you get a lot of people from the neighbourhood? Or is it very specific, the people you get here?

That's a good question, because landing with this project – especially as an artist, in a neighbourhood where I don't live – I feel that I should definitely do more outreach to the direct neighbours. But it's also about this question: what is the neighbourhood? Who are the people? Who are you talking to? I'm not intentionally looking for people who think the same as me, but I think it's

mostly about making space for certain thoughts and certain counter-actions, and for solidarity also. Especially when a space needs to run commercially, you can't be so politically outspoken, and I think that's really lacking in Rotterdam. Profit-driven spaces also kill a lot of this because it's all about: what are these people gonna think if you do this, or what kind of people are you gonna exclude? So maybe I actually really want to exclude. Maybe I'm absolutely not an inclusive space at all. And I don't want to be – because I'm for very specific people, and for a very specific cause.

Do you work together with other initiatives?

Yes I do, but not in the way I run KIOSK. For example, I got to know Lianne Enkhuizen, who runs The Base Bookspace, which is an online bookstore with a selection of black authors. I met her, I think, two years ago when she passed by KIOSK. I was going on holiday for a month then and we started talking, and I said that I could give her the keys and she could take over and run the bookshop with her titles for a month, to see how it is to have a physical space. And then she did that for a month, and she also organised amazing film programmes, talks, and also a lot of Instagram live interviews with authors. After that, she did a weekend take-over once a month. So, there's just specific people who have the keys and they can operate things.

Which challenges do you face in having to manage this?

I think not so many challenges, because I'm actually trying to organise it in a way so there's not so much risk. The thing that I sometimes question a bit though, is that it could be more collective. But then you set up a certain infrastructure that can also make things more difficult. For example, if I don't have time, I can just say I'm not open. It's not a commercial rent I have to pay. I'm not tied to funding. So I can be very outspoken, also on what my opinions are, etc. But the thing is that it takes time and it doesn't generate any income. You need to be able to create a life for yourself that's viable.

Are you the only one managing the space?

Yes, I'm the only one who manages KIOSK. So that also means managing the website, the Instagram account, the e-mail, all the invoice payments, etc. The biggest challenge is time. And also, how can I have my own practice next to running something like this? And that's difficult. Because

you need a lot of time to do research and to make things. And I mean, I'm open one day a week, but still every day there's something to answer, to do, or to organise.

Is this a choice you made, to run it by yourself? Or would you be open to also having people working here?

I could make it more collective, but what's difficult in this case, is to determine where the responsibility is. Because often when you set up things collectively, everybody shies away from responsibility, and a lot of the important things are still on one person. So I sometimes see that a collective is not only about running a space and going through all the steps together, making decisions through consensus. I feel that the collective part also lies in taking responsibility as an individual, that one day a week there's this space in the city where you can come and have tea and coffee for free, read books, sit – there are events, I can give the keys to people, I can explain how it works, and that's kind of my responsibility, toward the bigger idea of what's collective. If you start making everything a collective decision, then sometimes nothing happens, because there's actually no space to really do shit. So I think: let's just do the action and reflect later! You need to do things in order to gain experience, and to understand what works and what doesn't.

During your school years, how did you start? What was the motivation to start being more politically involved, eventually managing to create something like this?

I think the arts really didn't politicise me! (laughs). I mean, art is also a very general term, but I think the way that arts and especially institutions are connected through an idea of finances and economy, that this very much shapes and determines what can be a practice. When I was studying at the Rietveld, we were very much pushed to being career-driven. I think there's not a lot of space in the arts for the whole multiplicity of a person – also concerning politics – unless you create it. When I was 13, in 2006, it was still legal to squat. So we would squat, with a group of friends that had a certain type of home situation that either wasn't safe, or that there was no space, or whatever. It was so simple: just entering a building, changing the lock, putting in a bed, a table and a chair – these were the three required elements. You would then call the police and the police would say, oh yeah, this is an established squat. Then you would send a letter to the owner, and the owner would either come by with people to kick you

out, or they would be like: okay, let's try to find an agreement. Maybe you pay a little bit for the electricity, or you stay there until a certain time. Then in 2010 or 2012, that changed. You can still squat, but they can just kick you out way easier, and it doesn't go through this idea that you call the police and say, hey, we squatted it, and you show it to them. I don't think this is how it runs anymore. But squatters were really protected. Back in the 1980s there was a lot of squatting, there was a lot of space, but it just wasn't maintained. There was a huge housing crisis, so squatting was a very normal thing to live through. Many families would live that way. There's also this beautiful film by Wendelien van Oldenborgh, that talks about the Bijlmer, this area in Amsterdam that was originally built around the idea of the nuclear family. But then, with the end of the colonies, a lot of people from Suriname and Curaçao came to the Netherlands, and they started to squat a lot, to set up their families and their lives in these squats. What's interesting also when you talk about political activism in the 1980s, is that there were a lot of higher-educated people who didn't have a job, because there was huge unemployment – but what they did have was time, and state-funded money, because the welfare system was more thriving than it is now, so they had the time to squat. They had the time to make newspapers, to set up actions, to do all this. It's not like that anymore nowadays.

Do you think that practices which start off as radical can ultimately be incorporated into the system?

Yes. First something starts out really radical, and then it becomes a kind of system itself, and it gets incorporated. That happens a lot. For example, in the 1990s or the early 2000s, I'm thinking of the generation of artists that started to do a lot of neighbourhood projects, for instance. I mean, careers have been built on this! You go somewhere, you do something with the neighbours, and then you go away again. It's very extractive also. And now it's being used really as a model in some kind of neighbourhood rejuvenation. This kind of idea of place-making. I think it's interesting to look into the practice of Jeanne van Heeswijk, she's an artist/designer who started the Afrikaanderwijk Coöperatie in the south of Rotterdam, and she works with this method of radicalising the locals. Having the knowledge and tools to work with the municipality, she sets up this structure, and the local people who have shops there, or who live in the neighbourhood, are in charge of these systems now. Managing how the trash collection goes, or setting up an association of all the shop owners. Which is interesting. But you could also question this a bit, because she also went to Philadelphia to do this, she also went to Liverpool to do this, etc. But I think her practice is quite interesting.

You said this space will be here for one more year or something?

Yeah, but there's already an extension for two more, so I think I can stay for three more years.

And after that, do you have any plans?

No, I can't make plans. There's no more looking into the future. If I'm able after that to again find something that isn't commercial, then of course I'll continue. And if I don't find it, then it's the end of it. Or it will need to find a different shape.

22.03.2024

Photograph by Chiara Tonndorf

Is it possible to run an autonomous bookstore that generates a sense of community and promotes critical thinking?

Philippa Driest, owner and creator of Kiosk, proves that it's possible. Hosting a selection of radical/critical theory among other genres, this space subverts the notion of the mainstream by promoting books that educate you on resistance. Community gatherings such as reading groups, workshops and solidarity fundraisers are frequently held in the space too. These are the spaces needed to start the change.

Photograph by Chiara Tonndorf

THE FUNAMBULIST
umbro

Epilogue

So then, what is alternative?

Through this whole process, we learned and discovered what the word "alternative" can mean, all the different meanings and ideas we can attribute to it. Which aspects of life we can apply it to, and which perspectives we can see it through. But one thing is clear: for an alternative to exist, there first needs to be a norm, and that norm is capitalism. These initiatives don't just transgress the norm, they subvert it. They turn it completely upside-down, they create new alternatives. The Poortgebouw shows us how communal living is possible, that there's an alternative to the nuclear family, and how this can be achieved. KIOSK is a space where critical thinking is promoted. Departing from the notion of mainstream bookstores, KIOSK hosts radical/critical theory, fiction, poetry and self-publishing practices. And SCRAP XL provides us an alternative to capitalist consumerism by giving waste materials a second chance, understanding them not only as something to buy but as something to (re)use.

It's important to note that these initiatives acted in accordance with the theory they were based on. They actually built all these spaces and communities. They acted upon their practices and made these a reality. All these initiatives show and prove that change is possible. We can and must subvert the norm. We need to analyse and question ourselves, as well as our surroundings and actions, in order to see the norm for what it really is, and to fight it. Getting involved and taking action is the first step for resistance.

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Printed at
WdKA Publication Station

Special thanks to
wolf engelen

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As first-year students at an art academy, we were interested in learning about how various initiatives can promote alternative ways of living. Researching a small number of the initiatives that exist in Rotterdam provided us with our first tools for making our own attempts. We hope that by sharing our process through this publication, we will help people in a similar situation to develop some first insights on how to act alternatively to what they consider the norm.